



VPs 65, 66, 92, AND 94 DEACTIVATED

By LCdr. Rick Burgess, USN (Ret.)

A long drawdown of the Navy's reserve patrol (VP) squadrons came to an end in November 2007 with the deactivation of the VP-92 Minutemen, one of a force of reserve P-3 Orion patrol squadrons that peaked at 13 during the Cold War and deployed in support of fleet antisubmarine, antisurface, and minelaying missions as well as fleet exercises. Three other reserve VP squadrons—the VP-65 Tridents, VP-66 Liberty Bells, and VP-94 Crawfishers—deactivated in 2006.

Only two reserve VP squadrons, the VP-62 Broadarrows and VP-69 Totems, remain in service. Like VP-92 did before its deactivation, they converted their roles from deploying reserve force squadrons to serving as Fleet Response Units (FRUs) that train reserve crews to augment the 12 active duty fleet VP squadrons. Their parent wing, Commander Reserve Patrol Wing, was deactivated at NASJRB Willow Grove, Pa., on 30 June 2007 (following ceremonies held on 23 June), when wing commander Capt. Christopher A. Patton transferred control of the last reserve VP squadrons to the active patrol wings at their respective bases.

During the Cold War the reserve VP squadrons typically deployed for one-month-long active duty for training (ACDUTRA) periods each year to various sites world-wide, with its crews serving two-week segments,

often augmenting active duty squadrons at their deployment sites in the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans and the Mediterranean Sea. Their activity was not limited to deployments, however. They often deployed in small detachments for short periods wherever needed. They flew the same types of missions, tracking Soviet submarines and other naval units and participating in fleet exercises.

Beginning in the early 1980s reserve VP squadrons took on the bulk of counterdrug operations in the Caribbean and Latin America, operating from a number of sites in Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Belize, Curacao, Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. They routinely provided detachments to participate in the annual UNITAS exercise with South American navies. Reserve VP squadrons and master augment units also participated in the 1991 Persian Gulf War and patrols in support of allied operations in Bosnia and the Adriatic Sea. Reserve VP crews also supported operations in southwest Asia during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, which continue to receive support from the two remaining VP FRUs.

VP-65 Tridents

VP-65 was deactivated on 31 March 2006, with a ceremony on 4 March 2006. Cdr. Kevin Simpson was the last CO of the Tridents.

VP-65 established on 16 November 1970 at NAS Los Alamitos, Calif., but moved in January 1971 to Point Mugu, Calif. After four years of operating the SP-2H Neptune, VP-65 upgraded to the P-3A Orion from May 1974 to July 1975.

During a Western Pacific ACDUTRA period in summer 1980, VP-65 participated in rescue operations for Vietnamese refugees. In 1983 the squadron began its first detachments in support of drug interdiction operations. In December 1986 the squadron completed a transition to the P-3B tactical navigation modification version, or P-3B(Mod). From May 1991 through July 1993, the Tridents upgraded to the P-3C(Mod). VP-65 was the last reserve VP squadron to deploy to NAS Adak, Alaska, before the island base was reduced to caretaker status.

In June 1994 VP-65 received its first Update II.5 version of the P-3C. In February 1997 it became the first reserve squadron to operate the Counter-Drug Upgrade version of the P-3C, equipped with the AVX-1 Cluster Ranger long-range electro-optical sensor. In 1998 the Tridents became the first West Coast reserve VP squadron to deploy to the Caribbean.

In 2000 the Tridents began receiving Update III versions of the P-3C to augment its Update II/II.5 aircraft. In 2004, VP-65 reduced its overall strength as it transferred its Update III aircraft to fleet units. The Tridents deployed for the last time in 2005, during which a squadron aircraft detected and photographed a drug-running semisubmersible craft.

VP-66 Liberty Bells

VP-66 was deactivated on 31 March 2006, with a ceremony on 11 February 2006. Cdr. James Custer was the last CO of the Liberty Bells.

VP-66, initially known as the Boxcars, was established on 1 November 1970 at



NAS Willow Grove, Pa., and equipped with the SP-2H Neptune patrol aircraft. The squadron upgraded to the P-3A Orion during 1973–1974, and to the P-3A(Mod) in 1982–1983. In 1990 the squadron switched to the P-3B(Mod).

In 1993 VP-66 flew missions in support of United Nations operations over Bosnia, and in 1994 the United Nations embargo of Haiti. That year the Liberty Bells assumed an electronic aggressor role for fleet training, and accepted two EP-3J Orions from Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron 33. In May 1994 the squadron began a transition to the Update II version of the P-3C, which it completed in May 1996. In 1996 squadron crews flew surveillance missions from Entebbe, Uganda, to monitor the civil war in Rwanda.

VP-66 transferred its two EP-3Js to Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron 11 in August 1997. Also that year, VP-66 received a Counter-Drug Upgrade P-3C versions for increased capability in drug interdiction.

In September 2001 VP-66 began receiving the Block Modification Upgrade Program (BMUP) version of the P-3C, giving the squadron compatibility with the fleet's Update III versions.

VP-92 Minutemen

VP-92 was deactivated on 30 November 2007, with a ceremony on 13 October 2007 at NAS Brunswick, Maine. Cdr. Scott Bailey was the last CO of the Minutemen.

VP-92 was established on 1 November 1970 at NAS South Weymouth, Mass., equipped with the SP-2H Neptune. During the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, a squadron SP-2H was used to fly spare parts for the A-4 Skyhawk aircraft being delivered to the Israeli Air Force. The squadron transferred its last SP-2H in January 1975 and received its first P-3A Orion the next month, completing



Facing page, the VP-65 Tridents flew the SP-2H Neptune during the squadron's first four years. This page, a P-3C Orion from VP-66 takes off from NAS Keflavik, Iceland, on 15 August 2003. Photo by JO2 Mark O'Donald.





the transition in October 1976. In 1984 the Minutemen upgraded to the P-3B(Mod) version.

In April 1990 VP-92 became the first reserve force squadron to participate in an annual UNITAS exercise in South America. From July 1991 through July 1993 VP-92 transitioned to the P-3C Update II version. In July and August 1993 the Minutemen flew Operation Sharp Guard missions in the Adriatic Sea to enforce an arms embargo in the former Yugoslavia. VP-92 was the first to deploy

the Remote Imaging Transmission System and used it with effect in the Adriatic. From April through June 1994, VP-66 flew surveillance sorties in support of Operation Support Democracy in Haiti.

In 1996 VP-92 upgraded to the Update II.5 version of the P-3C and moved to NAS Brunswick, Maine, in



Above, VP-66 crewmembers maneuver their P-3C Orion over the North Atlantic Ocean during Keflavik Tactical Exchange exercises on 16 August 2003. Photo by JO2 Mark O'Donald. Right, VP-92 personnel pose in front of their SP-2H Neptune at NAS South Weymouth, Mass., in 1971. Facing page, above, AM2 Chad Albee with VP-94 conducts maintenance on a P-3C Orion brake assembly at NAS New Orleans, La., on 16 November 2004. Photo by PH2 Justin C. Proulx.



preparation for the closure of NAS South Weymouth. In 1998 the Minutemen began a transition to the P-3C Update III.

In 2006 VP-92 was transformed from a reserve force squadron into an FRU and assigned the role of training crews to augment fleet squadrons at NAS Brunswick.

VP-94 Crawfishers

VP-94 deactivated on 31 March 2006 as NASJRB New Orleans, La., with a ceremony on 13 May 2006, delayed by the slow recovery from Hurricane

Katrina. Cdr. Matthew Dubois was the last CO of the Crawfishers.



VP-94 was established on 1 November 1970 at NAS New Orleans, formed from reserve units VP-61X1 and VP-45X2 (which redesignated in 1968 to VP-821 and VP-822,

respectively). The Crawfishers initially flew the SP-2H Neptune. The squadron's last Neptunes transferred in August 1976, replaced by P-3A Orions in October 1976. Between September 1984 and November 1985, the Crawfishers upgraded to the P-3B(Mod) version.

In summer 1993 VP-94 flew armed missions for Operation Sharp Guard/Maritime Guard in the Adriatic Sea and Bosnia to enforce an arms embargo in the former Yugoslavia. In 1994 VP-94 flew surveillance sorties in support of Operation Support Democracy in Haiti. In 1995 the Crawfishers began transitioning to the Update II.5 version of the P-3C, completing the



change in September 1996 as the last reserve force patrol squadron to switch to the P-3C. On 20 October 1995 the squadron dedicated the last Navy P-3B to fly an operational mission, BuNo 153444, for display at NASJRB New Orleans.

In 2001 VP-94 crews flew humanitarian relief missions for Belize. When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in August 2005, VP-94 evacuated from NASJRB New Orleans. The squadron did not resume operations because it was scheduled for deactivation.

